

NEWS

From the Office of

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County Efforts Help Secure Funds for Increased Desert Fire Protection

BARSTOW – San Bernardino County First District Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt today announced success in an effort by San Bernardino and other Western counties to secure additional federal funds to offset the costs of providing services in areas with large federal land ownership and low property tax base.

The Supervisor said he intends to ask the Board of Supervisors to use these funds, which could amount to \$5.6 million over four years, to build and staff a much-needed fire station along a remote portion of Interstate 40, along with other fire and emergency service improvements. Mitzelfelt has proposed that a new County fire station be built in the area between Ludlow and Amboy, where accident response times from the Barstow, Baker or Needles areas can be as long as 45 minutes to an hour.

The additional funds are a result of the President's October 3rd signing of the financial institutions "bailout" legislation, which included an unprecedented allocation of full funding for the Department of Interior's Payments In Lieu of Taxes program (PILT). PILT partially assists counties in funding local services in areas dominated by federal lands, like the Mojave Desert, but it has not been funded to the level authorized by statute since its inception in 1976.

Supervisor Mitzelfelt serves on the National Association of Counties (NACo) Public Lands Steering Committee. The committee has directed the advocacy efforts of NACo, who along with San Bernardino County's public lands consultant and Director of Legislative Affairs and other Western counties helped secure the additional dollars.

"I'm gratified to see our efforts over the past eight years to increase PILT funding helped elevate this issue to a high-profile position within a high-profile legislative package," Mitzelfelt said.

This progress may be considered the most recent in a series of steps by Mitzelfelt to improve fire safety in outlying areas. Supervisor Mitzelfelt's efforts to plan a fire station to serve Interstate 40 in the area between Ludlow and Amboy first moved ahead on June 24 when Mitzelfelt secured Board of Supervisors approval for \$300,000 to go toward design work for the station.

A second proposed station in Goffs would augment fire protection and rescue services to the eastern Mojave Desert and the transportation corridors of I-40, Highway 95 and Route 66 (National Trails Highway). The station would also provide the communities of Baker, Needles, Havasu Lake and Kelso with additional backup resources. The proposed Goffs station took its first step in August when

the Board of Supervisors approved the sale of surplus land to the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District. Goffs is situated 30 miles west of Needles and 50 miles east of Amboy.

Supervisor Mitzelfelt credits increased safety along the interstate corridors between Nevada and California to the County's fire station in Baker that opened in two years ago, along with increased staffing and equipment. These resulted from significant General Fund support. He also credits mutual aid with other agencies, including the Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow Fire Department, which responds to hundreds of calls off the base per year. Mitzelfelt recently recognized Base Fire Chief Robert Wyman for his department's recent selection as the Best Large Fire Department in the Defense Department.

Finally, the Board of Supervisors on September 16 approved a proposal by Supervisor Mitzelfelt to donate a surplus fire engine to the Yermo Community Services District (CSD). The CSD, which provides fire protection services in Yermo and the surrounding area – including the County's Calico Ghost Town Regional Park – was in need of an additional fire engine after recent breakdowns of other equipment.